(b) MRTP Commission, a quasi-judicial body, is already seized of the matter regarding cartelization by the cement companies.

(c) The information is being collected from the State Government.

Trade Imbalance with China

3857. MS. MABEL REBELLO:
SHRI B.J. PANDA:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that our trade imbalance with China has grown very fast and there is an urgent need to rectify this; and

(b) if so, what is the existing trade deficit, *inter-alia* indicating the action plan of the Government to bridge this gap?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) and (b) The trade balance is currently in favour of China. During the year 2006-07, imports from China were US$ 17.44 billion and exports US$ 8.28 billion resulting in trade deficit of US$ 9.16 billion. The issue of rising trade deficit was taken up by the Commerce & Industry Minister on January 12,2008 during his talks with the Chinese Minister of Commerce. However, the Government does not plan to bridge trade gaps with individual countries.

Connivance of cement companies in fixing prices

†3858. SHRI SATYAVRAT CHATURVEDI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC) in its decision has stated that the cement companies of private sector had connived in fixing the prices of cement from February, 1990 to April, 1990;

(b) the retail prices of cement in December, 2005 and December, 2007;

(c) the reasons behind rapid price-hike of cement; and

(d) the action being taken by Government against the companies responsible for it?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL POLICY AND PROMOTION MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI ASHWANI KUMAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d) The average price of cement in December 2005 was Rs. 158/- per bag and Rs. 230/- per bag in December 2007. The increase in cement prices is mainly due to mis-match between demand and supply. Government has taken a number of measures to increase the supply of cement in the market to cater to increased demand. These include facilitating import by reducing the import duty on cement to 'Nil', removal of countervailing duty and special additional customs duty. Further, MMTC Ltd., a Government of India enterprise, TANCEM, a State Government enterprise of Tamil Nadu and M/s. Puducherry Agro Services

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.